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Effective strategy implementation: why partnership matters

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Title: Effective strategy implementation: why partnership inter-connectivity matters.

Abstract: Planners and city officials are increasingly being encouraged to create and make use of a variety of partnerships designed to tackle 'wicked-issues' in their localities. However, many of these partnerships are by nature ephemeral, lasting only as long as their funding exists or until their particular work-package is completed. A great deal of attention is paid to the internal functioning of these partnerships but rather less is paid to the structural elements involved in how these partnerships are mapped onto existing governing structures. This creates a problem where the knowledge generated by these partnerships may also be seen as ephemeral, adding to partnership fatigue and cynicism amongst stakeholders. By linking network structure and collaborative capacity, I explore the depth of penetration and longevity of the knowledge created in such local partnerships.

1. Introduction

In recent decades regional development policy has shifted from neo-classical or supply-side models of growth creation that sought, for example, to balance the movements of labour and capital, to what can be termed indigenous and endogenous growth strategies (Armstrong and Taylor, 2000; Pike et al, 2006; Tödtling, 2011). The idea of bottom up policy, or as Stöhr (1990) might term it "development from below", has clearly found resonance with both academics and policy makers alike. Given the current UK government's emphasis on localism and decentralisation - particularly through the Localism Act 2011 - it is worth reflecting on a policy promulgated by the last government that also sought to unharness the competitive advantage of localities by "...placing the private business sector centre stage in regeneration initiatives" (GHK, 2003, page 3).

City Growth, launched in July 2001, was to be a private sector led growth initiative charged with reinvigorating deprived local areas by creating an enterprise culture through the promotion of local economic clusters. The programme was associated with Michael Porter and the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, and was part of a reorientation of local economic development in England, which chose to emphasise local competitive advantages rather than directly ameliorating local disadvantage. In so doing, City Growth turned away from more traditional 'welfarist' policies in deprived areas, towards the promotion of an enterprise culture (Syrett and North, 2010). It was funded through the Small Business Service within the Department of Trade and Industry using

money from the Phoenix Development Fund[1]. In total there were seventeen partnerships formed

across England, seven of which were in London and each of whom were responsible for creating a

local strategic plan.

What is of interest here is not the uniqueness of a scheme trying to introduce the ideas of

Michael Porter into English local economic development and landuse planning (for a good analysis

see Atherton, 2003 in this journal). Rather, what stands out is the sheer number of schemes that

introduce new 'specialist' partnerships with their accompanying strategic plans into what many

have described as an already congested policy field (Burfitt et al, 2007; Pemberton and Winstanley,

2010; Skelcher, 2000). From the City Growth Partnerships studied here, to the various partnership

structures associated with Area Based Initiatives (Lawless, 2004), community economic

development (Lawless, 2001) and community planning (Cowell, 2004) (including the new

Neighbourhood Forums now enabled under the Localism Act 2011), planners and city officials are

increasingly being encouraged to enter into partnerships and to create multi-stakeholder strategies

to solve 'wicked issues' [2]in their local areas (Bailey and Pill, 2011; Davies, 2009; Coaffee and Deas,

2008). The result of this has frequently been both ephemeral partnerships (Holman, 2007; Davies,

2003; Dowding et al, 1999) where the knowledge built up is lost when the project is concluded

(Carley, 2000), and confusion as to where the strategies produced sit in relation to other local

planning documents (Lambert, 2006). This latter issue has also been raised as a concern regarding

Neighbourhood Development Plans emanating from the Localism Act (Holman and Rydin,

Forthcoming).

In understanding this form of governing, much effort has been put into describing the

synergies that are developed from partnership working (Audit Commission, 2009; Hemphill et al,

2006; Mackintosh, 1992) and there is an expanding body of research that analyses the manner in

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[1] A grant of £250,000 was made over two years to each area (Ramsden, 2005, page 43).

[2] These 'wicked problems' as first described by Rittel and Webber (1973), consist of dilemmas where there is no linear
solution, where the nature of the problem evolves overtime as new solutions emerge and where co-ordination between
actors is vital.

which local government officers and planners can best work with these networks to accomplish policy goals (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Provan and Milward, 2001; Weber and Khademian, 2008). My research adds to this literature by examining one set of specialist partnerships and how these groups are mapped onto broader networks in the locality. It does so by analysing the cross-board memberships between City Growth Partnerships (CGP), Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP), Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CoCI) and other local economic development organisations and regeneration partnerships in ten English cities. To take this work further it then analyses the two most inter-connected and the two least inter-connected cities via a documentary analysis of the City Growth Strategy (CGS) produced by each partnership. Each CGS is compared to other local strategic plans looking for policy integration in the form of shared priorities, common goals and language. The paper suggests that strong levels of partnership inter-connectivity in the form of cross-board memberships is directly related to well integrated local strategic planning documents that reflect mutual priorities amongst network members. This finding has important practical implications. First, as Kettl (2002) notes, a key goal for modern local government is the ability to manage multiple partnerships within both horizontal and vertical systems so that these collaboratives are integrated and focused on problem solving. The research detailed in this paper underscores that understanding and ensuring that there is inter-connectivity between partnerships is a key element in achieving this goal. Second, the findings point to the importance of inter-connectivity in terms of continued business buy-in to urban partnerships and overall levels of partnership fatigue. Finally, the research helps us to better understand the importance of structure in an ever-growing network of local governing arrangements. In a policy era dominated by localism and decentralisation such insights are invaluable to ensuring that synergies promised are deliverable and partnerships are not merely short-lived events.

2. Framing the research

To understand how CGPs function as part of the overall matrix of local economic development it is important to place them within the context of urban partnerships, which Mackintosh (1992) states have "become one of the code words of our times in the field of public policy generally, and local economic development in particular" (page 210). By doing this we acknowledge the role network interaction and the development of trust, norms, values, and institutional practices have within current urban governing structures (See Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998 for a discussion of modes of partnership – most specifically 'network'). Additionally, it allows us to explore the changing face of local government (Skelcher, 2000) which, in the last decades, moved from largely bureaucratic institutions to fragmentary organisations reliant on a "rich web" of collaborative organisations, which are said to help overcome the 'silo mentality' of local hierarchical systems making the approach to the wicked problems mentioned above easier to address (Weber and Khademian, 2008). Given the current Government's agenda of localism, partnership arrangements are set to have increasing importance in this milieux, especially in the area of neighbourhood planning where citizens and local businesses are expected to come together through a parish council or neighbourhood forum to create neighbourhood development plans (Holman and Rydin, Forthcoming).

Partnerships, then, are said to provide an avenue for collaborative capacity to be developed allowing *strategic aims and knowledge to be shared across agencies and amongst stakeholders*. This will be articulated through both a process of formalised relationships between actors within a structure, and 'networking': the "…longer-term process of developing new forms of governance" (Lowndes et al, 1997, page 342). This synergy, as described by Mackintosh (1992) Hemphill et al (2006) and Weber and Khademian (2008), affords actors (both public and private) benefits that flow from their joint working and interdependency; or as Huxham (1996) would put it – 'collaborative advantage'.

However, one must be careful before running headlong into the belief that partnerships provide synergy, which therefore naturally advances along the path of better governing (Holman, 2008). In a recent article examining partnerships and regeneration in Portugal, Breda-Vàsquez et al (2009) remind us that many of the arguments in favour of partnership are normative in nature, a point strongly linked to Baum's (2000) work on the fantasies and realities of partnership working. Here we see both authors challenge a discourse that uncritically asserts that if we only make places for partnerships to occur we can, as if by magic, create new resources that will allow us to solve intractable urban problems. The reality is far more complex. To be successful, urban partnerships require more than a space to operate. They require clarity of objectives, policy integration and, as this paper will argue, consideration about how they fit into the overall matrix of local governing. For without reflection on how new partnerships are mapped onto extant networks, opportunities for broader relationship building and knowledge transfer may be lost or unnecessarily impeded.

One goal for partnership governance is to avoid some of the problems associated with collaborative work; resource costs (Audit Commission, 2009), lack of participatory structures (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004) and accountability (Bäckstrand, 2006). One issue specifically considered here is the concept of partnership fatigue, which was first noted by Peck and Tickell in 1994 and further outlined by the Audit Commission in 1998 and 2005 (cited in Coulson, 2005). As Cochrane comments, "...it is hard to escape concerns about the extent to which the proliferation of partnerships, organizations and groups all claiming status in particular policy areas may ultimately simply lead to confusion and inaction" (2010, page 371). In part, the recent development of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) through the *Local Government Act 2000* is meant to counteract this complexity by offering an organising umbrella under which partnerships may operate, although the Audit Commission (2005, 2009) has already flagged the complex structure of many LSPs who are dealing with a proliferation of area-based partnerships.

The purported key to success would then appear to be that partnerships function as more than "…unnecessarily bureaucratic, vague, time-consuming, and local authority-led" organisations (Worthington et al, 2003, page 97), or as Carley (2000) puts it: "merely talking shops", which bring the concept of partnership working into disrepute (page 276). The manner for avoiding this is tied to ensuring that partnerships not only grapple with strategic issues (ibid), but are also integrated into and supported by the structures of local governance (Carley, 2006). This point is supported by Stoker (1996) and Sullivan (2001) who emphasise the importance of network interactions. Furthermore The Audit Commission in its report *Governing Partnerships: Bridging the Accountability Gap* (2005) also takes this position when discussing the effectiveness of LSPs. Here the Commission remarks that when LSPs create clear linkages between themselves and their thematic partnerships, better, more integrated, policies and plans emerge from the process (2005, page 15). With such an abundance of partnerships and investment across the UK, it is *vital* for inter-connectivity to exist.

Inter-connectivity and institutional setting are especially important for business partnerships, like City Growth, where innovation and regional development are said to be linked in "...subtle but pervasive ways" (Sotarauta and Pulkkinen, 2011, page 96). In their study on business involvement in Local Agenda 21 in the East Midlands, Worthington et al (2003) comment that engaging SMEs requires partnerships "that have clear direction, stated objectives, identifiable benefits, a defined role for participants, short time horizons, action orientation, and tangible outcomes" (page 104) where actors are able to contribute to policy objectives. Likewise, Ball et al (2003) note that private sector actors tended to be pragmatically sceptical where urban regeneration partnerships were concerned, noting that issues of governance, decision-making structures, cost implications and timeframes were all barriers to their full and fruitful participation. Finally, writing from the business perspective, Googins and Rochlin (2000) and Fuller (2005) echo these points, noting that

for cross-sector partnerships to be relevant for businesses there must be an understanding of how the partnership can generate value and relevance for the participants.

The primary focus of this paper is developed from these valuable insights. By examining the ties between local governance structures in each of ten cities through a network analysis, and then deepening this research with a close documentary analysis of the strategies produced by the CGPs and other key local plans, we open an important window onto the impact these overlapping ties have on collaborative capacity and knowledge transfer between networked partners.

3. Network Analysis

A rigourous examination of the linkages between actors and events is a well established, robust form of analysis that has been carried out both at a national scale (See Mills, 1956) and a local scale (See Davis et al, 1941) for many years where elite power and social relations have been examined. In fact, network analysis has significantly contributed to the work of community power scholars such as Hunter (1953), Domhoff (1967), Laumann & Pappi (1973) and Laumann, Pappi & Verbrugge (1974), where social ties and club memberships were examined alongside more traditional attributes of power to offer a more nuanced answer to the question of "who governs?". One of the key benefits of looking at actors and events simultaneously is that it allows us to visualise these relationships "…in three ways: first, they show how the actors and events are related to each other; second, the events create ties among actors; and third, the actors create ties among events" (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, page 295). As such, affiliation networks must be seen as two-mode networks rather than the more traditional one-mode network of dyads normally examined with social network analysis. These dual networks have been used in describing corporate interlocks between firms (Barnes & Ritter, 2001; Burris, 1991; Burt, 1980 and 1983; Davis, 1991; Mizruchi, 1996); trustee interlocks in higher education (Ingram, 1995; Pusser et al, 2006); urban regimes (De Socio, 2007); and social capital and community economic development (Crowe, 2007). Key in each of these studies is the manner in which information, trust, and norms are built up via

inter-organisational co-operation and information sharing across firms, organisations, and social groups, with the aim of building "relationships and common ways of working ... to achieve [a] policy goal" (Rydin & Holman, 2004, page 121). It is here - *within these interlocks* - that this research focuses, suggesting that the better connected CGPs are within the local economic development community the better able they will be at achieving strategic policy outcomes for their strategies.

In each of the ten City Growth areas outside London, lists of board memberships were obtained for the CGP, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CoCI), and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) along with other local economic development partnerships, and urban regeneration partnerships where relevant. The rationale for selecting these groups was based on the strategic policy making function of LSPs that have typically taken on the role of writing the new Community Strategies required by the 2001 Local Government Act, and on the potential strategic importance of local economic development organisations to urban competitiveness (Deas and Giordano, 2001). Once board membership lists had been obtained, affiliation matrices were created, which indicated how many tied memberships were shared across the organisations. The following table shows city population, overall network size (n), number of actors with cross ties, connectivity[3], and number of ties made to city growth.

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[3] In this case connectivity is expressed as the number of individuals with connections > 1 divided by number of actors in the graph.

City	Population	n	ties	mean	CG/ties
St Helens	176,845	40	11	0.275	7
Derby	221,716	79	15	0.190	9
Portsmouth	186,704	81	12	0.148	6
Leeds	715,404	56	8	0.143	3
Liverpool	439,476	65	9	0.138	3
Leicester	279,923	95	13	0.137	6
Nottingham	266,955	74	9	0.122	4
Plymouth	240,718	71	7	0.099	4
Manchester (CG Area)	392,819 (196,636)	76	7	0.092	1
Luton	184,390	68	4	0.059	2
Overall Mean				0.145	
					ONS Census 2001

Table 1 Network Integration

As can be seen from the table, St Helens, Derby and Portsmouth all fall above the mean of

0.145 making them relatively well connected networks. For St Helens just over 63% of these ties

can be attributed to links between CGP and other organisations, whilst for Derby this figure is 60%

and falls to 50% for Portsmouth. Looking at the sociograms for the most inter-connected networks

(Figures 1 and 2) a pattern of dense ties across all the partnerships can be seen linking the various

organisations. For St Helens, the closeness of the LSP and CoCI to the CGP is clearly illustrated by

the spread of ties; and for Derby it is readily apparent that the CGP is centrally connected to the

LSP, the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership (DDEP), and to some extent both the CoCI
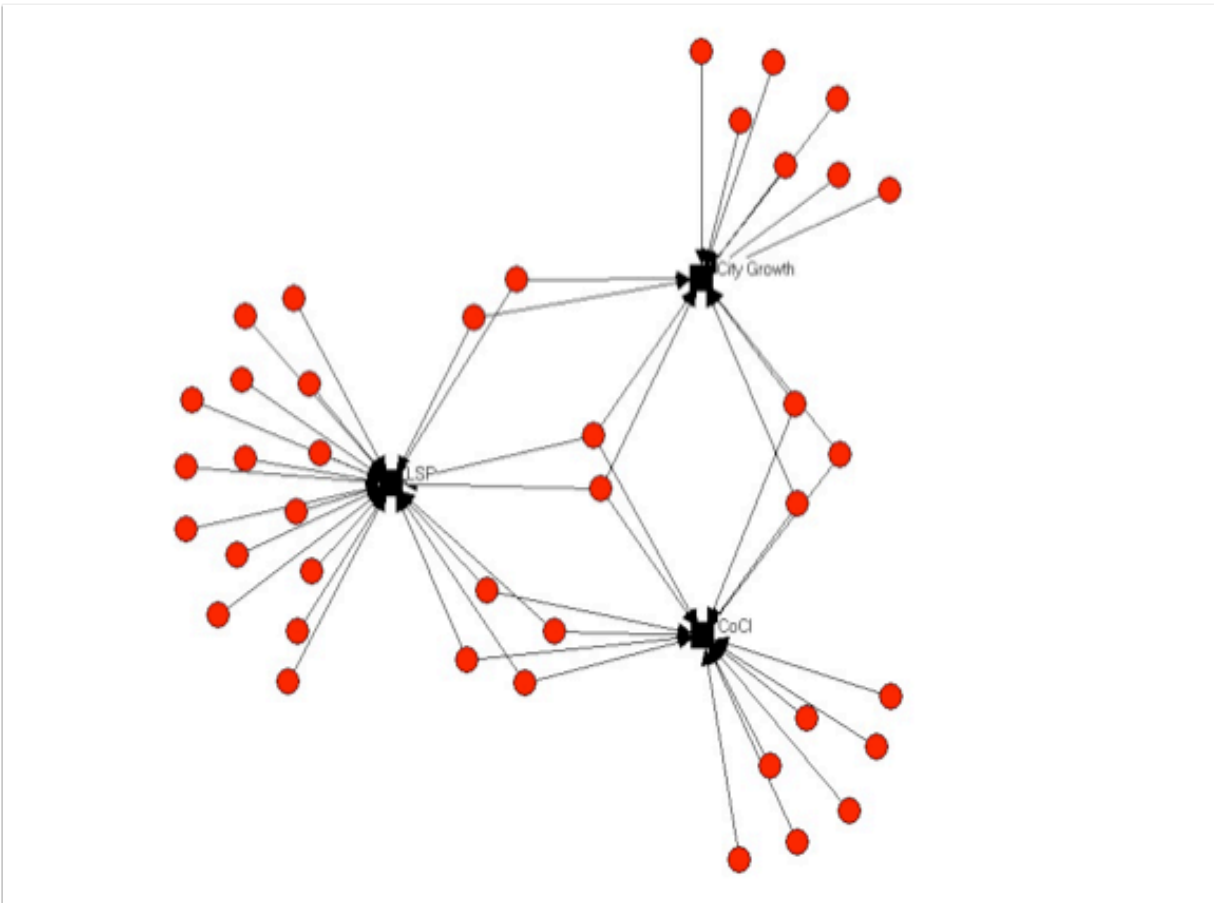
and Cityscape.

Figure 1 - St Helens' Affiliation Matrix
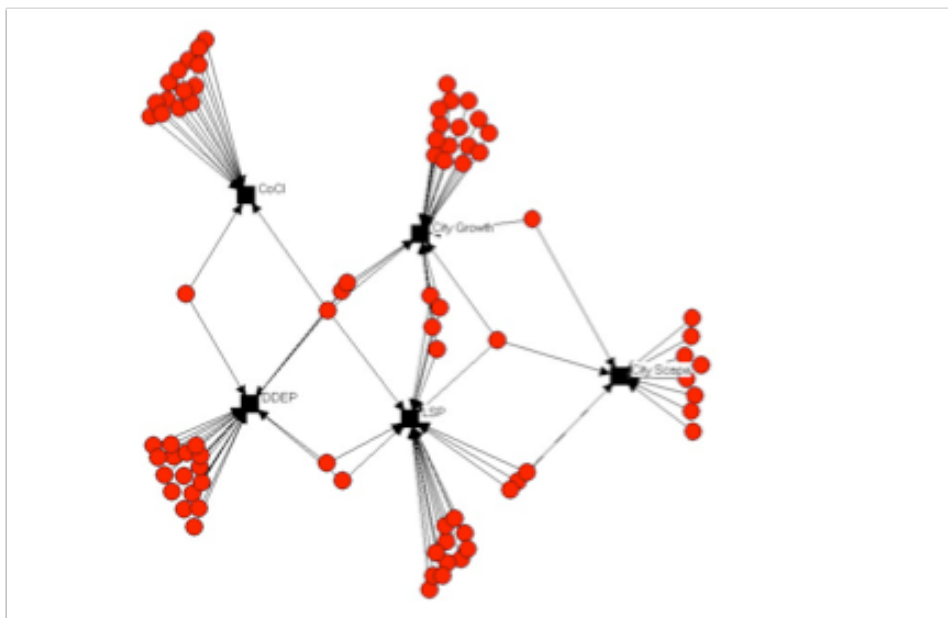

Figure 2 - Derby's Affiliation Matrix

Turning to the cities at the bottom of the table (Figures 3 and 4) Manchester and Luton both

show disparate and disconnected graphs, illustrating overall network weakness and areas of

potentially poor communication (Holman, 2008). In the case of Manchester, connection to the local economic development organisation or to the LSP must flow through the CoCI. This single tie is the *only* inter-connectivity the CGP has with the rest of the actors within the network. In the case of Luton, only four ties exist between the actors and organisations overall. For the CGP, two of these ties link them to both the LSP and to the local economic development organisation. Looking at these graphs from the perspective of Crowe's (2007) work on inter-organisational networks and community economic development strategies, one could postulate that both St Helens and Derby, with their more interconnected networks, should have higher levels of trust and norms operating between these partnerships, than would Manchester and Luton. This in turn may have an impact on the integration of City Growth aims and ideas within other local strategic plans.
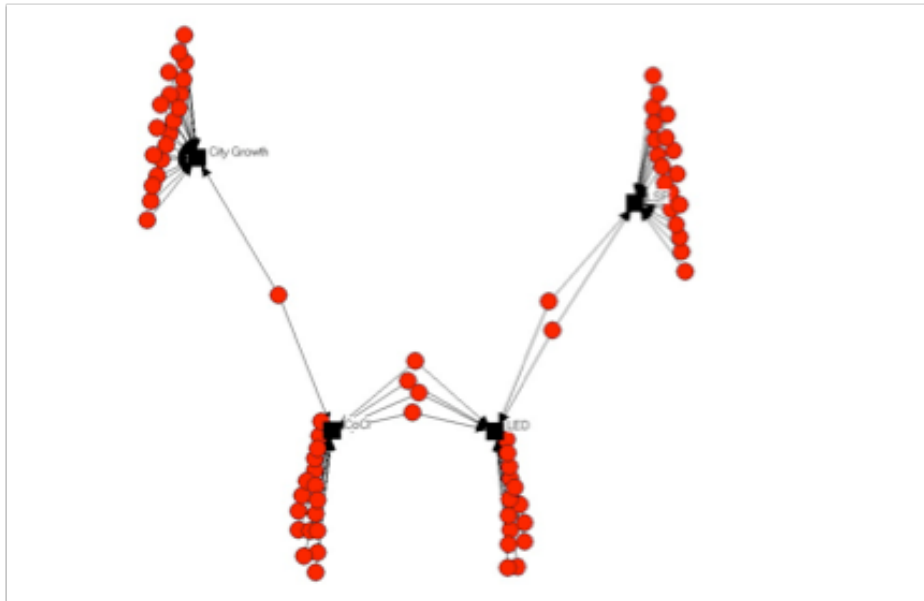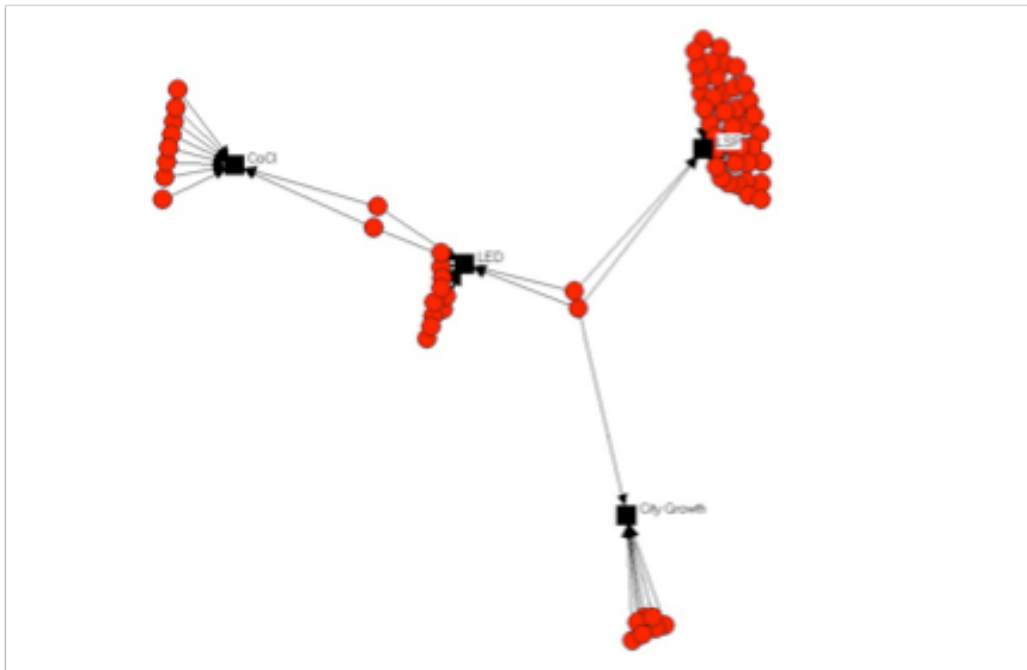
Figure 3 - Manchester's Affiliation Matrix

Figure 4 - Luton's Affiliation Matrix

4. Documentary Analysis

Three key documents were obtained for each of the case study areas for analysis and comparison against the City Growth Strategies (CGS). These were: the Corporate Plan for the local authority - a document that "lays out for managers within the Council the strategic priorities that should form the backbone for their Business Plans" (Manchester, 2007, page 3); the Community Strategy (or Plan) '…seen as the key strategic document binding together local partners" (Lambert, 2006, page 246); and the Local Area Agreement (LAA), which sets out priorities agreed between central government and the local area and, most importantly, "wraps around the economic development functions in each…local authority" (Convery, 2006, page 317). Whilst one must be wary of issues of self-presentation and the kinds of information that can be gleaned from a close reading of strategies and plans, these official documents were chosen for analysis and comparison as they serve as "...*institutionalized traces* that may be legitimately used to draw conclusions about the activities, intentions and ideas of their creators or the organizations they represent" (Wolff, 2004, page 284). Our analysis specifically compared the documents examining their policy goals, language and project level alignment looking for evidence of overlap and common aims amongst the strategies. (See Table 2 for a timeline and list of all documents analysed).

4.1 St Helens

St Helens is located in the Northwest of England, which was particularly hard hit by the economic restructuring of recent decades and has felt the force of loss of employment and economic inactivity. In spite of these structural problems, St Helens has a strong record of partnership working between the council and local businesses. In 1978, it set up the country's first Enterprise agency with local manufacturer Pilkington, which, in 1996, merged with the local CoCI (St Helens, 2007). The CoCI has also been singled out as having the highest penetration of membership and take up of services anywhere in the country (Convery, 2006, page 319) and the LSP, which grew out of the country's first public private partnership founded in 1989, is noted as a considerable force in

urban regeneration within St Helens. It is perhaps not surprising that the affiliation network for St Helens showed a tight web of organisations (especially regarding CGP) and that it was praised in the City Growth evaluation reports for having a strong private sector presence on its board (GHK, 2003, 2005). Given this backdrop, one might expect there to be a high level of synergy between the CGS and the other strategies prepared in St Helens as the cross-board memberships would facilitate opportunities for knowledge transfer to occur (Weber and Khademian, 2008) and relationships of trust to develop (Provan and Milward, 2001).

St Helens' CGS was adopted in 2003 as the 10 year local economic development plan for the Borough. It was organised around four key themes, which encompassed economic competitiveness and the development of local business clusters; a cultural transformation of the area alongside the creation of an enterprise culture; a physical transformation of the area, and the establishment of a new, more modern, image for the borough. Primary projects designed to achieve these objectives include the creation of move-on space for local businesses, the revitalisation of the town centre, the creation of new training and educational opportunities, the building of three new urban villages, and the improvement of leisure facilities for the area.

At a broad level of analysis all three core documents for St Helens mirrored the CGS in terms of shared priorities, common goals and language. This was especially apparent in the case of two core CGS goals, which are replicated *fully* in all of the other strategies. The first is that of transforming both the physical and psychological 'space' of St Helens through iconic architecture, public arts and pride-building activities. Here, language centring on vibrancy, modernity and distinctiveness is emphasised and replicated in each document. The second theme present in all four strategies is the goal of trying to increase business activity through the creative provision of different kinds of business space within the borough. Again, there is a strong emphasis in each of the plans that this floor-space should be modern, and should meet the needs of SMEs and increasing entrepreneurial activity in St Helens.

Moving from the broad to the specific, St Helens Corporate Plan 2006/09 outlines four projects emphasised in the CGS that are currently being implemented, and that are key corporate priorities for St Helens. These are: progress toward the provision of two of the three urban villages listed in the CGS; the creation of new business space as per the strategy; progress toward the development of a bold city brand, "Destination St Helens"; and a new sports stadium also listed in the CGS as integral to making St Helens the leisure borough for the region. The continued development and support of the CGS is noted as one of the Council's key corporate priorities. Moving the analysis forward in time St Helens' Corporate Plan 2008/11 states that "As the majority of the 50+ projects identified in the original CGS have been or are in the process of being delivered after only 4 years a revised CGS is being produced..."(page 49). This clearly illustrates a longevity for the CG partnership and the CGS and helps to illustrate the degree of impact City Growth has in St Helens, and the level to which it has crossed over from a single function strategy and partnership to a well integrated set of locally important priorities.

The Community Plan (2002-2012) also makes strong references to the CGS noting the importance of business partnerships to the success of St Helens, whilst tying the 'economic prosperity' section of the plan *directly* to the CGS. Additionally, the Community Plan notes the importance of developing the borough's five target economic clusters, and specifically mentions the CGS goals of revitalising the town centre and becoming the leisure borough for the region. Indeed, the synergy between the CGS and the Community Plan is interesting when viewed in relation to the strong linkages seen in Figure 1 between the LSP and CG partnership. The strengthening of these linkages are highlighted in the Community Plan where it is noted that the "...LSP has remained closely involved with the work of the City Growth Strategy and this has been a really positive development enabling the economic objectives of the LSP to gain clarity and commitment." (St Helens, 2004, page 52).

Importantly, the Local Area Agreement for St Helens utilises the plan as part of the delivery structure for the Economic Prosperity Thematic Group under the LAA project delivery structure framework, and underscores that the delivery of City Growth projects is a focal point of this partnership group. Along with this, a number of key projects (e.g. the Omega Skills Action Plan and the Graduate Greenhouse programme) detailed in the CGS are also noted as sub-outcomes of the LAA. This highlights a level of cross-over between the plans and partnerships, whereby the projects and goals of one group are fed through as projects and goals of another.

4.2 Derby

Derby is a mid-sized town located in the UK Midlands near to the regional centres of Nottingham, Leicester, and York. Home to Rolls Royce for some 100 years, it has a heavy concentration of advanced manufacturing and research and design businesses, with a burgeoning art, design and technology sector that is closely aligned and supported by its university. There are also a number of business and financial services employers present in Pride Park, which was developed as a part of the City Challenge regeneration programme in the mid 1990s. Much like St Helens, Derby has a strong history of partnership development stemming from its early 1990s bid to attract Toyota's European manufacturing plant, which was noted for laying the groundwork for its successful City Challenge bid (Taussik & Smalley, 1998, page 287) and extending outward to to-day's tightly knit network of organisations focused on regeneration and economic development.

Unlike St Helens' predominantly private sector CG partnership, Derby has an evenly mixed Board with management resting with a private sector member. The CGS, however, makes an emphasis on partnership and plan integration, stating that, "Our strategic framework is entirely consistent with the aims of the new Regional Economic Strategy for the East Midlands and the DDEP Business Plan, alongside other key policy documents for the region" (2006, page 34). Similar prominence is also given to the inter-linkage of partnerships and plans in the other core documents examined illustrating a real effort has been made to 'join-up' both organisations and

their aims. When reflecting on Figure 2 it is clear that strong cross-over exists between the various boards in Derby, which is consistent with this aim.

Taking the plans individually, Derby's Corporate Plan 2007-2010 strongly reflects the CGS in terms of common goals and language. This is most apparent within its Key Priority 2 "Creating a 21st Century city centre" where not only are CGS priorities and projects linked with the Corporate Plan there is an *explicit tie* between the CGP and the Urban Regeneration Company, Cityscape, who are charged with revitalising the town centre. Again, referring to Figure 2, this is not surprising considering that the CGP is directly tied to the Cityscape board, thus allowing for avenues of communication to exist where knowledge can be shared and trust can be built. The Corporate Plan also binds itself to CG through Corporate Priority 1 "Making us proud of our neighbours" by creating a key outcome (1.4) "reducing inequalities between neighbourhoods by supporting the creation of job opportunities". Here, the projects *Workstation* and *Workstation Normanton* are supported to increase employment opportunities in Derby and the area of Normanton located on the city fringe. These are specific goals outlined in the CGS (Derby CGS, 2006, page 34).

Derby's first Community Strategy, the 2020 Vision for 2003-06 (with action plans for 2005-06), calls for the Derby City Partnership (LSP) to endorse the CGS and to develop employment and skills within the clusters it identifies. In the updated 2020 Vision Progress Report (2006), the LSP continues to extol the need for revitalising the city centre, a CGS priority, and specifically discusses the enhancement of employment and training in the manufacturing and engineering, creative industries, retail, and tourism sectors - *all of which are the clusters highlighted in the CGS.* Given the multiple ties between Derby's CGP and its LSP this is not surprising as clearly ample opportunities for communication and negotiation would exist between the two groups.

Moreover, one of the strongest and most powerful examples of the influence and longevity of City Growth in Derby is its official role as one of the thematic subgroups in Derby's LSP. Here,

the CGP (along with five other subgroups) is charged with adding value and setting strategies that contribute to the 2020 Vision by developing integrated service planning, aligning resources and commissioning services (DCP, 2006, page 2). Clearly Derby has embraced the CGP and encompassed it within their own LSP structure making it a powerful strategic element of plan development.

Finally, Derby's LAA is divided into broad strategic priorities, with Economic Development and Enterprise being one of its "core blocks". Here the influence of the CGS is readily apparent, as much of the research undertaken to write the CGS is utilised to form this section of the LAA, which is also tied to the Prosperous City Plan found in Derby's Community Strategy. There is strong support for cluster development, and ten action points are outlined to aid in this process. Indeed, the LAA purposefully emphasises its linkages with the CGS, the links between other local regeneration initiatives (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Fund), and the private sector leadership of the CGP.

4.3 Manchester

Of the four CGP discussed in this paper, Manchester is the only one to take an area approach, focusing its efforts solely on sixteen wards south of the city centre. This area, known as South Manchester, encompasses roughly two-thirds of Manchester's Unitary Authority. South Manchester has strong levels of employment and enterprise, and is also home to the Manchester International Airport, a bio-tech cluster based around the University and area hospitals, and the Oxford Road "Knowledge Corridor" (Manchester, CGS 2006, page 4). However, alongside these assets the area also faces a number of challenges. Unemployment and economic inactivity is high amongst residents of working age and skill levels are lower than average for the United Kingdom (Manchester CGS, 2006, page 5).

The CGS is designed to emphasise the assets of South Manchester through the development of three clusters: its creative and media industries; financial and professional services; and bio-life

science sector. It is organised around four key priorities including the development and support of creative and cultural industries, the improvement of local centres, growing and extending business opportunities, and retaining and growing talent. There is also a reflection of the need to build up Manchester and especially South Manchester as a "Knowledge Capital".

Like Derby, the Manchester CGB is evenly split between public and private sector members, but with Board management resting with the public sector. City Growth was connected to other partnerships in Manchester through a single cross-board membership between CGP and the CoCI. Based on this lack of overall inter-connectivity the expectation would be that strategic cross-over between the plans is limited.

Unlike the LAAs of both St Helens and Derby, Manchester's LAAs (2006, 2008) make no mention of the CG initiative. The LAAs are organised around three key spines of: reaching full potential in employment and education; creating neighbourhoods of choice; and individual and collective self-esteem/mutual respect. The strategy produced by the CGP only reflects, in part, the neighbourhoods of choice spine of the LAA, illustrating very little cross-over between the plans in terms of shared priorities. There is, however, some synergy in the earlier LAA (2006) where the three clusters highlighted in the CGS are replicated in the LAA. However, these are produced alongside two other clusters: Manufacturing & Communications and the Manchester Airport. This reflects a level of dissonance between the two strategy documents in the sense that the LAA spreads the number of clusters to be developed. Whilst certainly this could be explained, in part, by the fact that Manchester chose an area based approach to City Growth (and it would therefore be natural for the city as a whole to have additional clusters) it does not explain why the airport, which is located in South Manchester appears in the LAA and not in the CGS. There is also some degree of synergy between the earlier LAA and CGS in terms of building up Manchester as a Knowledge Capital. However, the documents are not nearly as reflective of the CGS as were the LAAs of Derby and St Helens where CGS research was used to formulate the economic development strategy in Derby's

LAA and where the delivery structure for the Economic Prosperity Thematic group specifically cites CGS projects as measures of success in St Helens.

Moving on to the Corporate Plan (2007) we again see no specific mention of the CG initiative, unlike in the better connected networks of St Helens and Derby where the CGS is noted as a council priority and specific CGS projects are listed as measures of success and common goals. What synergy *is* present is seen between Manchester's Corporate Plan, its LAA and its Community Strategy - all of which reiterate the vision for Manchester based on the three LAA spines mentioned above. Whilst the Corporate Plan does list the three industries noted in the CGS for development, there is very little cross-over between the two plans, even in the Economic Development section where one might expect common goals.

Finally, Manchester's Community Strategy (2006) again makes no mention of City Growth, nor does it replicate the clusters highlighted in the CGS. It does, however, reflect the three spines also seen in the Corporate Strategy and LAAs, underscoring a great deal of cross-over between these three key core strategies - all of which were produced in conjunction with the LSP and Manchester City Council. However, the lack of integration of the CGS into these core strategies is indicative of the weak connectivity between CG partnership and the other partnerships (see Figure 3). Again this is starkly different from the strategies produced in both Derby and St Helens where there was considerable partnership interconnectivity, and intermingling of ideas and priorities amongst the plans.

Since Manchester took an area based approach to its CGS, one further strategic plan was analysed: the South Manchester Regeneration Framework (2007). If there were to be strong levels of synergy between plans it should be witnessed here, at this more local level; and, indeed, reference to CGS is stronger in the SMRF. The three clusters highlighted in the CGS are replicated in the regeneration framework, and City Growth as an initiative is mentioned twice within the 183-page document where many of its goals and priorities are taken up, including: the support for

creative industries, the creation of more attractive local centres, the retention and growing of local talent, and support for SMEs. Despite this closer match, however, there is still no acknowledgement of the work put into the strategy developed by the City Growth partnership, nor a clear link to the partnership beyond two brief notations in the framework. This is in sharp contrast to the more thorough and regular comments on City Growth in the more connected cases of Derby and St Helens.

4.4 Luton

Luton is located 30 miles north of London and has a strong manufacturing tradition. However, economic restructuring has meant that plant closures and downsizing have all affected the employment market through job losses and constriction of markets for supply companies. Nevertheless, in a recent report by the Audit Commission, Luton was praised for making good progress on the transition from a manufacturing based to a service based economy (Audit Commission, 2006, page 5). Luton's CGS therefore reflects the challenges of economic transition focusing on four locally strong clusters: Aerospace; Airport; Food & Drink and Information Communications Technology. The CGS has a central vision statement for 2012 and beyond which, seeks "a dynamic town built through capitalising on opportunities for growth; nurturing its businesses and communities; exploiting innovation providing an enabling environment; and driving for success" (Luton CGS, 2006, page 1)

Luton's CG Board, like St Helens', was predominately business led. However, unlike St Helens, as seen in Figure 4, Luton presents a fairly unconnected graph with only two cross-board memberships tying the CGP to the LSP and the local economic development partnership. We would therefore not expect much integration to exist between the plans.

Luton's CGS is not reflected in its Corporate Plan (2005, 2009) in any way. In fact, Luton tries to position itself as a green economy that is adapting to climate change, which is in contrast to the CGS strategy of supporting the airport as a growth area. There are linkages to the CGS in the

Community Strategy (2005, 2008), which lists CGS as a partner, and does prioritise one of the CGS key drivers – "promoting the internal and external image of Luton". The imminent production of the CGS is also noted under Strategic Priority 1 "To develop a sustainable 'take it, make it, move it' high skill and high value economy" within the Community Strategy. Here, the production of the CGS is a delivery target for the Strategic Objective 1.1 "To increase business relocation to Luton" (Luton Forum, 2005, page 26). Finally, in the LAA (2006) the CGS is tied to the failed bid for additional central government funding and the upcoming re-submission of this bid. However, by the 2009 LAA any mention of the CGS has fallen away altogether, and the economy has been tied to the environment as it is in the Corporate Plan. The only other place within this document that the CGS is mentioned is under the Economic and Enterprise block of the plan where it is again directly tied to the failed bid for additional central government funding. In terms of longevity Luton does have a website for its CGP however this site has not been maintained, and no new material has been added since April 2009.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS

Both St Helens and Derby showed a strong level of partnership inter-connectivity (7/11 ties and 9/15 ties respectively) between their CGP and other local economic development and strategic partnerships. This was clearly reflected in a better take up of CGS objectives and projects in local strategic plans in each city. St Helens, for example, adopted its CGS as its 10-year local economic development plan; its aims and projects were also integrated into the three key local plans discussed in this paper. Similarly, Derby also showed a high level of synergy between its CGS and other local strategic plans. The Corporate Plan, Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement all linked tightly with the CGS in terms of shared priorities, common goals and language. What is notably important in these two cases is that in the integration between plans went beyond generic goals to a level of specificity where individual aims and projects were adopted across the plans. This is also reflected in the longevity of each partnership; a key point to partnership success noted by Baum

(2000). In the case of St Helens this is illustrated by the fact that a new 10-year CG strategy has been adopted, and in Derby by the fact that the CGP now forms part of the LSP.

In Manchester and Luton, the inter-connectivity between City Growth and other local economic development and strategic partnerships was clearly less advanced (1/7 ties and 2/4 respectively). In Manchester, the only connections between CGP and other local partnerships occurred through the CoCI; in Luton, CGP was tied only to the LSP and a local economic development organisation, making both graphs factional in nature. This is more likely to create networks where information is not shared fully, and common economic interests are harder to agree (Crowe, 2007, page 474). This lack of inter-connectivity is further displayed in the paucity of CGS aims and objectives appearing in either area's local strategic plans. In Manchester, where there was no connection between CGP and the LSP, no mention of the CGS is made in any of the three key plans (though CGS is reflected in the South Manchester Regeneration Framework). Luton, with its links between CGP occurring with its LSP and LED organisation, does have some reference to the CGS within its three key local plans, but this remains at a superficial level and is often tied to its bid to receive government funding - perhaps making its CGP more geared toward budget enlargement rather than strategic development.

A number of countervailing points could be argued here. Firstly, in the case of St Helens, perhaps time was a factor in the levels of integration between plans and inter-connectivity between partnerships, as St Helens was a Phase 1 City Growth area and therefore had more time to develop and digest City Growth aims and objectives into other local plans. However, time cannot explain the level of integration seen in Derby, which began the City Growth process at the same time as both Manchester and Luton. Rather, it would appear that the selection of partners who were inter-connected into the *already present* web of local economic development and strategic partnerships played a role in translating City Growth aims and objectives into broader policy goals. Both St Helens (GHK, 2003, 2005) and Derby (Taussik & Smalley, 1998) had a strong history of public-

private partnership working, which they utilised in their City Growth development. This factor is significant since, as Carley (2000) pointed out in his article on urban partnerships in Britain, the pre-organisation of the business community through either a strong CoCI or other local economic development body is *key* to linking the needs of local business into local initiatives and strategic plans (page 283). Manchester has also had a considerable record in public-private partnerships (see for example Deas & Giordano, 2001 or Tewdwr-Jones & McNeill, 2000). However, it would appear that in the case of City Growth, effort was not especially made to bring the partnership *within the fold* of local economic development organisations. This may be reflective of a tendency toward 'grant coalitions' in Manchester (Tewdwr-Jones & McNeill, 2000) where income maximisation is sought rather than specific partnership development goals.

Secondly, an argument could be raised that this paper also succumbs to the notion of 'partnerships as fantasy' (Baum, 2000), and that what is seen in this research could be explained by alternative corollary factors. Here it is important to recognise that the argument being made is not that it is important to simply bring people together in partnership to create synergies that solve problems. Rather, the argument of this research is that if we continue to press forward with specialist partnership formation we must give thought to *how these are embedded into the milieux of local governance*. In not doing this we risk having a number of weakly connected organisations creating plans destined to gather dust on shelves as plan implementation often lies outside the originating partnership.

Thus, by embedding partnerships within broader local governance structures we appear to increase the abilities of these groups to get their priorities onto wider local agendas like Community Strategies, Corporate Plans, and Local Area Agreements. Perhaps the functionality here is that, through partnership inter-connection, opportunities arise for networking amongst actors and across partnerships, which in turn helps to build bonds of trust and norms that then translate into mutually held strategic policy aims. If the goal is for local communities to reap the benefits of partnership

working through policy innovation, the sharing of local knowledge, better resource efficiency, competitive advantage, and higher levels of social cohesion, then thought must be put into how the various partnerships and initiatives are networked together. Moreover, if we are to avoid partnership fatigue and create avenues for relevant business participation, where those involved are able to see value in their contributions (Googins & Rochlin, 2000), we must consider the ramifications of network structure and existing bonds of trust before embarking on more partnership creation (Holman, 2008). Certainly the research findings here would support Carely's (2006) assertion that, "the achievements of even good partnerships are limited unless they are integrated into local governance decision structures rather than detached from them" (page 215).

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